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CRITICAL REMARKS

ON

PIZARRA,

A

TRAGEDY,

TAKEN FROM THE GERMAN DRAMA OF

KOTZEBUE,

AND

ADAPTED TO THE ENGLISH STAGE

BY

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

WITH

INCIDENTAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

SUBJECT OF THE DRAMA.

BY

SAMUEL ARGENT BARDSLEY, M.D.

LONDON:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Critical Remarks were written on the spur of the occasion, to fulfil a duty imposed on the Author as Member of a Literary Society*. They were read and discussed at two meetings of that Society, at a time when provincial curiosity (which had stood on the tiptoe of expectation) was first gratified with the representation of Pizarro.

If the first appearance of this bright Star in the Theatrical Hemisphere astonished the Inhabitants of the Metropolis (accustomed to marvellous sights), and drew them forth in crowds, night after night, to contemplate its dazzling Splendour; no wonder then it was gazed upon with equal, if not superior, rapture, by its planet-struck admirers in a provincial

* Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester.

Town. Like Aaron's Rod, the Tragedy of Pizarro swallowed up every other Competitor. It not only took sole possession of the Theatre, but also intruded itself into every private Society. Indeed, the high degree of Interest which this Drama excited in the place of the Author's residence, has been his chief inducement for publishing the present Critique. He has purposely avoided entering into any comparison between the respective Merits and Defects of the original German Author and his Adapter.

The following Remarks apply solely to the Drama adapted to the English Stage and published by Mr. Sheridan, who, in his Dedication, seems to dwell with no small degree of complacency on the success of his adopted favourite.

In justice to himself, and the Author of an ingenious "Critique on the Tragedy of Pizarro *," the Writer of the following criticism is under the necessity of avowing,

* A Critique on Pizarro. Published by W. Miller, Old Bond Street.

his entire ignorance of the existence of such a performance, until his own had been prepared for the Prefs.

That a coincidence may be observed between several of the Remarks in that “Critique” and the present Work, cannot be denied. But this coincidence relates almost solely to the more obvious defects of Pizarro, and to the circumstance of pointing out their absurdity by exposing them to the shafts of the Adapter’s own Ridicule. It is presumed that, in other respects, the two performances so materially differ, as to justify the Author in submitting to the Public these further Strictures on a Tragedy, which has taken almost entire possession of the Stage, and gone through numerous editions from the Prefs.

Manchester,
April 14th, 1800.

CRITICAL REMARKS, &c.

“ Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
“ Doctum imitatorem, et vivas hinc ducere voces*.”
HORAT. de Arte Poeticâ.

IT is the opinion of an elegant Writer and judicious Critic †, that a perfect Tragedy is the highest effort of poetical genius. Indeed the difficulty of attaining excellence in dramatic composition, is manifested by the small number of Tragic pieces, which, since the origin of the Drama, have been sanctioned by critical and universal approbation.

Our own Age and Country afford too many proofs of the truth of the above remark. Me-

* “ Then let a skilful writer scan
“ The life and character of man,
“ And from that genuine source dispense
“ Words that accord with Truth and Sense.”

BOSCAWEN's Horace.

† Addison.

diocrity

diocritiy in this delightful and instructive species of composition is but seldom attained. Yet, if popular applause from the crowded benches of a Theatre, and rapid and multiplied editions from the Press*, were sufficient proofs of the real excellence of dramatic writing, the works of former days must “hide their diminish’d heads.”

To the German Muse we are indebted for this wonderful revolution of the Drama.

Perhaps not one of the productions of the German School has excited more attention and been crowned with more applause, than the subject of the present criticism. As the joint production of Two of the most celebrated dramatic Writers of Germany and England (Kotzebue and Sheridan) it not only roused a spirit of universal curiosity, but likewise, from its flattering reception, challenged the scrutiny of general criticism.

I trust then, that the celebrity of the performance, and the influence it may have on public taste, will apologize for entering, somewhat at length, into an analysis of its various merits and defects. I propose to consider this Drama under the following heads :—

1st, The Fable ; and the composition, or arrangement, of the Incidents.

2d, The Characters and Manners.

* Pizarro has gone through Fifteen Editions.

3d, The Sentiments.

4th, The Style.

5th, The Moral.

The Fable.

IT is not my intention to discuss minutely the question, whether the Fable of the Tragic Drama should be founded in fiction, or derived from historical facts? The Author having preferred the latter, I consider him as happy in the choice of his subject. He must possess a wonderful share of invention and very uncommon ingenuity, who, at this period, could strike out any thing novel and interesting from Grecian or Roman History. The Romans for the most part copied the Grecian Tragedies, or founded their Fables on the History of Greece. The early prejudice imbibed in favour of those Gods of their idolatry, the Heroes of Greece and Rome, has led Writers, in succeeding ages, to adopt their characters and exploits, with an equal degree of fondness, as fit subjects for the Tragic Muse. The Romances of the middle ages have also furnished plots to so many of our dramatic Writers, that no small difficulty, at this period, would occur, in selecting any worthy of adoption from a source so nearly exhausted.

The

The æra of the conquest of Peru is neither too remote nor too familiar; but has acquired that venerable cast and air, which Tragedy demands, and Time alone can give. The discovery of a new World, and the establishment of a vast Empire by an obscure adventurer, are circumstances well calculated to excite attention and command admiration. But, in the structure of his Fable, the Author has grossly violated historical probability. I need not enlarge here on the particulars of his deviation from well known historical facts. If we wish to be acquainted with the transactions of Pizarro, we need only to consult the luminous pages of Robertson. We shall there find, that the timid and wretched Peruvians, distracted by civil broils, as well as vanquished by the superior Arms and Courage of the Spaniards, bent under the iron yoke of Pizarro and his blood-stained followers. Instead of Atahualpa (commonly written Ataliba) being the conqueror of Pizarro, he became a royal Puppet in his hands; and, when interest and danger seemed to demand the sacrifice, he was basely condemned, after a mock trial, to be burnt alive: but by the tender mercies of his judges, his punishment was commuted to strangling. With respect to the introduction of those Characters which History is silent upon, or a description of circumstances connected with the

the main story and supported by probability*, the dramatic Poet has free scope for the exercise of his invention. If the Tragic Writer were to relate every circumstance just as it occurred, with historic fidelity, that unity of action, or skilful arrangement of the Incidents, which constitute a regular drama, would be unattainable by any exertion of his art. But there are limits to be placed to the exercise of this poetical licence. Fiction must not predominate over Truth. Their happy union, as the Roman Critic observes, must be the Poet's object :

“ Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remisct,
“ Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imumt.”

Aristotle, in his Art of Poetry, notices : “ That in Tragedy it often happens, we are contented with one or two Names that are known; and all the rest are invented. It is

* Abbé du Bos in his Critical Reflections states, “ That a Tragic Poet acts contrary to his art, when he transgresses in too gross a manner, against History, Chronology, or Geography, by advancing facts that are contradicted by these Sciences.”

† “ While to such points his fiction tends,
“ So aptly Truth with Falsehood blends,
“ That all the parts to one design,
“ Beginning, middle, end, combine.”

HORACE's Art of Poetry: Boscawen.

“ not

" not therefore necessary always *scrupulously* to follow known Fables, from whence the subjects of Tragedies are generally drawn."

To heighten the pleasure arising from Verisimilitude, and thus more powerfully to affect our feelings, a dramatic Author selects some interesting portion of History, as the foundation of his subject. He certainly gains some advantages by this method ; but he also exposes himself to inconveniences of perhaps equal moment. He must be fettered by the trammels of historic facts. He cannot violate these truths without exciting a disgust, equal to the pleasure communicated by an adherence to historical evidence. It is within the limits of Probability, that an Elvira might have accompanied Pizarro in his adventures in the new World, and yet History be silent on that head. Much less can any objection be urged against Rolla and Cora, with many other fictitious Peruvian Characters *. But when Alonzo, not known in History, teaches the Peruvians to worst the Spaniards in pitched Battles ; slays their Commander ; settles the Peruvian King upon his throne ; and finally expels the Spaniards from all their conquests ;—instead of yielding passive acquiescence to the monstrous

* Marmontel, in his delightful fiction of the "Inca of Peru," furnished these additional Characters.

fable, we turn aside, and cry out with the Poet,

“ Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi *.”

Having stated objections to the Author’s manner of treating the Subject, I proceed to consider the composition or arrangement of the Incidents †.

* “ Such Scenes we ne’er admit as true,
“ And, disbelieving, hate to view.”

HORACE.

† Aristotle in his Art of Poetry seems to consider the composition of the Fable as the most effential part of a Tragedy, as requiring Invention (with him) the characteristic of a Poet. Besides as he considers Tragedy to be properly an imitation not of Men, but of their Actions, Lives, good or ill Fortune, the more naturally and faithfully these are represented in Action, the more they will be likely to excite the sympathy and improve the passions of the Spectators.

No better reason can be given for appealing to the Dogmas of established Critics, such as Aristotle and Horace, than what is contained in the following remarks of an elegant Critic: “ Rules themselves are indeed nothing but an appeal to experience, conclusions drawn from wide and general observation of the aptness of certain means to produce those impressions. It may be affirmed universally of all didactic writing, that it is employed in referring particular facts to general principles. General principles themselves can often be referred to others more general; and these again carried still higher, till we come to a single principle in which all the rest are involved. When this is done, Science of every kind has attained its highest perfection.” HURD.

In

In treating on this part of the Subject, it is not my intention to give a regular sketch of the whole plot of this drama ; but chiefly to point out what I consider to be irregular and inconsistent in the Composition and arrangement of the various Incidents. The violation of the Dramatic Unities of Action, Time, and Place, was considered by the ancient Critics as an insuperable obstacle to the Merit or Success of a dramatic Composition. But, happily for the interest of the drama, our own Country has produced dramatic Writers, who, unfettered by general Rules, have so overpowered the impassioned feelings of their Audience, as to transport them with rapidity over the boundless extent of time and space. The truly inspired Poet may safely neglect the Dogmas of rigid criticism. He appeals to a higher Tribunal—to Sentiment *.

* “ Ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur
 “ Ire poëta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
 “ Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
 “ Ut magus ; et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.”

HORAT.

“ That Bard I deem of highest powers possest,
 “ Who with fictitious anguish racks my breast :
 “ Who irritates and soothes, whose magic charms
 “ Fill me with terrible, though false, alarms :
 “ Who bears me, as he shifts the Scene, at will
 “ To Thebes or Athens by his wond'rous skill.”

BOSCAWEN.

In

In Pizarro, the three dramatic unities have not occupied an equal degree of the Author's attention. The Action, I conceive, not to be sufficiently simple. Yet, upon the whole, the episodical parts are subservient to the main design. That unity of Action so rigidly insisted upon by the Greeks, and followed by some of the French Writers, would not suit a British Audience. Nor indeed is the pleasure arising from the introduction of a variety of Characters, force of Contrast, and surprize of Incident, to be sacrificed to the preservation of strict unity in the action of the drama. If the action be not interrupted, nor the main story unnecessarily broken by extraneous matter, the Poet may be permitted to diversify his plot, by introducing a variety of Characters and Incidents. Undoubtedly, in Pizarro the Incidents become crowded, especially in the last A&t: And indeed the Action is so much confused, by the Clang of Arms and Shouts of Battle, that the Author may boast, with Mr. Bays in the Rehearsal, that "It shall Drum, Trumpet, Shout "and Battle, egad, with any of the most warlike Tragedies, either ancient or modern."

The unity of Time is sufficiently attended to. The Action is comprised within the generally prescribed period of Twenty-four Hours, as the Play opens with the morning of one day, and closes early at the same period of the ensuing day.

pay. The unity of Place has not been so strictly preserved. Yet, the liberties the Author has taken on this head, may be perhaps justified by the practice of the strictest observers of the unities in our most regular dramas. Notwithstanding, I conceive that, during the same Act, a *sudden* change of place, without *preparation* or notice, tends greatly to destroy dramatic illusion*. In the Second Scene of the Third Act, a glaring instance of this impropriety occurs. In the previous Scene, Rolla and Cora had appeared in a Wood close by the Peruvian Camp, from whence the latter flies in distraction to seek Alonzo, supposed to be slain. In

* An ingenious Critic, Lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticism, strongly contends for *no change* of Place, but after an Interval or Act. A change of Place therefore during an Act, ought never to be indulged, as it breaks its unity. For, "after such an Interval as an Act," the Critic observes, "the Imagination adapts itself to any place .. that is necessary, as readily as at the commencement of .. the piece." This critical Canon seems to be derived from the practice of the French Stage. Yet I think it may with safety be violated. It is only necessary that the transition be not too abrupt. For instance; the unity of Action suffers no interruption, by the change of place in the Third Scene of the Second Act, as we are prepared for this Scene (which represents a Sacrifice in the Temple of the Sun, by Alonzo's elevation of the King's approach, as denoted by the sound of Music. By this anticipation, the unities of Time and Place suffer no little interruption, as not to diminish the force of the Spectator's illusion.

a trice the Scene shifts, and behold Pizarro in his Tent ! Not prepared for this transition by any previous event, I must appeal to the test of general feeling, whether this change do not weaken the impression of Reality ? In the last Act, the unity of Place suffers a great interruption. The Scene is *unexpectedly* shifted, no less than thrice, from the Spanish Camp to the Tent of Ataliba, and from thence to the retreat among the Rocks. But it must in candor be allowed, that the unities of Time and Place (although contributing much to the "Cunning of the Scene") may with impunity be encroached upon, when the beauties of Character and Sentiment, and the Interest of dramatic Situation, demand such a sacrifice. In the arrangement of the Incidents, a stricter rule is to be followed. Their mutual dependence upon, and connection with each other ; and the Motives and Means, which produce the different events, should be clearly unsfolded to the Spectator. In the First Act of Pizarro, a strict attention has been paid, not only to the Unities, but also to the natural and easy development of the Plot. But what a falling off is there in the succeeding Acts ! In the Fourth Scene of the Second Act, an old blind Man and Boy are introduced, without any apparent motive or design, into the heat of Battle, near to the Camp. To this place the King retreats

wounded ; and, strange to tell, orders his guard to leave him in a place so exposed, that a soldier had been dispatched just before to ‘ warn the helpless to retreat farther among the Rocks !’ Yet *unarmed* and wounded is Ataliba left, by his Officers and Guard, without a single remonstrance or hint on their part of the danger of his situation. The Second Scene of the Third Act presents a striking instance of inattention on the part of the Author. Cora and her Child enter a Wood where they are joined by Rolla, who remarks that he had been *summoned* by *Cora* to this Interview. But this information is new to the Audience. They may indeed suppose that, like the Physician and Gentleman-Usher in the Rehearsal, “ they “ had been talking of this a pretty while with-“ out.” The Actors are compelled to fill up this chasm by Pantomimic representation. Would not all difficulty have been removed, in a much more simple manner, by a little whispering between the parties ?—Mr. Bays practised this mode with great success. The interview between Pizarro, Elvira, and Alonzo, (although the dialogue be spirited and characteristic) drags rather heavily, from its length and want of variety. Indeed the whole of the Third Act (of which this Scene comprises at least two-thirds) is so barren of Incident, and full of mere declamatory dialogue, that none but

but the most skilful and energetic Actors can render it in any degree tolerable.

The Fourth Act lies open to numerous and obvious objections. There is such poverty of Invention, and want of Connection in the chain of Incidents, as to reflect discredit on the Author's dramatic skill, or at least to convict him of culpable inattention. A Peruvian General, of distinguished Character and Renown even among the Spaniards, under the stale disguise of a Monk's Habit, is supposed to have passed undiscovered into the inmost recesses of the Spanish Camp. But that by the mere exchange of a Friar's Robe and Cowl, Alonzo should be so disguised (notwithstanding his legs were fettered with Chains) as to permit his passing through a guarded Prison, and finally to effect his escape, habited as a Spanish Priest, through the Spanish Camp and Out-posts, to the Peruvian Army :—are circumstances so marvellous, as may indeed “elevate and surprize,” but must fail to convince any other than a credulous and inattentive Audience.

After Alonzo's escape, Elvira next appears. She had previously dispatched a Soldier, to acquaint Alonzo with her intended visit. The Soldier obtained admission, by means of a Passport from Elvira. This Lady indeed appears to be endowed with very extraordinary authority over the whole of the Camp ; yet it is scarce-

ly credible, that Pizarro should have permitted such a degree of delegated power to remain with Elvira, after what had passed between them in the preceding Act. For we there find that Pizarro treats her intercession for Alonzo with jealous scorn and contumely. They separate mutually inflamed with Anger and Distrust. Her subsequent conduct plainly shews, that no reconciliation had been effected*.

After obtaining Rolla's real, or seeming, assent to assassinate Pizarro, Elvira urges the necessity of his first destroying the Centinel, before they can reach Pizarro's Tent. Yet this very Centinel was removed, by Elvira's order, to the outer Porch. What a pity this truly complaisant Soldier had not been directed to step a little farther out of the way, considering that Elvira entered the dungeon with the avowed purpose of effecting Alonzo's escape! But then we should have been deprived of Rolla's heroic forbearance, sentimental effusions, and moral reasoning; when instigated coolly to murder a man placed at his post of duty. This is truly a critical situation for the parties. No time was to be lost. How then do they contrive to extricate themselves? That remains a

* Truly, the facility with which Elvira gains admission to Alonzo, who was condemned to die on the lane morning, and to whose access was most strictly forbidden, is not one of the least marvels in all the Play.

secret locked up in the Author's breast. What artifice the tender-hearted Elvira used to gain over the "Old Castilian," (whom she had previously devoted to destruction) is most unfairly and discourteously (I deem it) kept a profound secret from the Audience.

In the Third Scene, Elvira informs Rolla (having first conducted him into Pizarro's Tent) that she will withdraw the attendant Guard. One might have imagined, that the Guard would have prevented Rolla's access to the Tent. But, as Sneer says in the Critic, we "may account for it" by supposing that, like Mr. Puff's Centinels, they were asleep "as fast as Watchmen;" and that, when the drowsy fit had left them, Elvira had only to order them off their Post. Yet this very Guard, so seasonably removed, it appears must have remained within ear-shot. For they at first rush forward on Pizarro's Summons, but stand so amazed at Elvira's Invective, that although scolded, threatened, and stormed at, by their indignant General, they quietly suffer her to exhaust the full torrent of her rage.

The Fifth Act does not want Incident. Lightning, Thunder, and a Song, introduce the wretched Cora. But this Storm is succeeded by a Calm. Alonzo's distant voice is heard. The vivid lightnings cease to flash, the harsh thunder dies away, and Cora rushes into Alonzo's arms. Wonders now like Alps on Alps arise.

arise. That Rolla should escape, with Cora's Child in his arms, from amidst the centre of an Army, destroy a Bridge, and slay a number of his pursuers, appears to me, I confess, to border a little on the marvellous. But what words can express our astonishment at the sequel? Pizarro attempts to carry off, by surprize, the Peruvian Women and Treasures, concealed in a recess among the Rocks. Defeated and surrounded, he fights in single combat with Alonzo, who, beaten down and disarmed by his Adversary, is on the point of being destroyed, when lo! Elvira, habited in the very dress in which Pizarro first beheld her, presents herself before the Conqueror; and, thus striking terror into his soul, renders him an easy conquest to his antagonist Alonzo*.

But to say nothing of the difficulty of evading Pizarro's peremptory orders for the instant execution of Alonzo, I would ask from what motive could she have been induced to the undertaking; and how was it practicable for her, habited as a Nun, to have penetrated through

* On the Stage, this Heroine, although habited as a Nun, is accou'tred with a Sword, (certainly a more deadly weapon than the lightning of her Eye) with which she furnishes Alonzo at the very moment of his defeat. I will not presume to determine whether this *a laf-thought* be an improvement of the original idea. It seems more level to the capacity of the 'Million' and is greeted, I am informed, with prodigious bursts of *aplauſ*!

the

the inmost recesses of the Peruvian strongholds, to the place where Pizarro was defeated? If the intention were to terrify Pizarro at the crisis of Alonzo's defeat, Elvira must have been blessed with the gift of second-sight to have foreseen this event. Indeed, nothing less than magical aid, or (as she observes) "an awful "impulse" can account for her opportune arrival, to put the finishing stroke to the Catastrophe. But may not Mr. Puff's observation, on a similar occasion, furnish the true Key to the marvellous events with which this Scene abounds? "Now Gentlemen," observes that judicious Character, "this Scene goes entirely "for what we call *Situation* and *Stage-effect*, by "which the greatest applause may be obtained "without the assistance of Language, Sentiment, or Character."

On the Characters and Manners.

AN attention to the Manners, in every dramatic work, is of the utmost importance. By this term is to be understood, not only the preservation of individual and general Character *, but

* " —— Honoratum si forte reponis Achillem,
" Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer," &c.
HORAT. de Arte Poeticâ.
" Thus

but likewise a regard to the general qualities and actions of Man, abstractedly considered. Aristotle compares (in the work before quoted) the Manners, in a dramatic Work, to the Colours in a Picture. “A Tragedy although excellent in plot, yet deficient in Character, may be compared (he says) to a well-drawn picture, where the most glowing colours are mixed on the Canvas without order or design.” And he observes that such a picture would not give half so much pleasure, as the well-wrought Sketches of a simple draught. The Manners also include a just representation of the modes and customs of a people, as varied by their government, peculiar prejudices, Laws, and Religion. These have not been sufficiently preserved in Pizarro. The Manners and Sentiments, on many occasions, belong more to the Spanish (or rather European) than to the Peruvian character. This is more especially to be observed in the Sentiments, as I shall have occasion to shew when I treat on this part of the subject. At present I intend to confine my observations to individual Characters. Among the chief of them Rolla stands pre-eminent, in the estima-

“ Thus if perchance you give to fame
 “ Achilles, ever honour'd man !
 “ Let him with passion wildly rave,
 “ He sorrows, fiercely brave,” &c.

BOSCHWELL'S HOMER,
 tion

tion both of the Author and the Public. Indeed the Character is boldly conceived and spiritedly executed, but I cannot add justly finished. His conduct, when Elvira instigates him to the assassination of Pizarro, is at least equivocal. His expression to Elvira, " And for Peru thou perishest ! Give me the Dagger,"— seems to insinuate that he was ashamed of his reluctance, and had resolved to comply with her proposal. And indeed it is only after an evident struggle, when in Pizarro's tent, that he abandons his intention. But in the manner of doing this, how can we reconcile his apparently ungenerous conduct towards Elvira, with his Character as a Hero ? What could be his motive for rousing Pizarro from his slumber, when he had previously determined to spare his life ? He must have been sensible that Elvira's life would become forfeited by the discovery. I see no mode of explaining his conduct, except that he wished to prove to Pizarro, that, of the two, he was the better Christian.

Would it not have been more consistent with the supposed Wisdom and Generosity of his Character, to have retired to the dungeon, and magnanimously waited there his doom : or, at least, to have endeavoured to escape with Elvira, rather than have compromised for his own safety by exposing her to the utmost peril ? For how was it probable he could have concealed

ed from Pizarro the means by which he obtained admission, supposing Elvira's strange indiscretion had not led to the discovery? There is another trait in his Character, which (in my opinion) tends to degrade the Hero in a much more important point of view. He is supposed to be the Lover of Cora, whom he had heroically resigned to the more favoured Alonzo. An intimate Friendship subsisted between the parties. When Rolla undertook the generous—the heroic task of sacrificing himself in order to obtain Alonzo's release, we admire and applaud the deed. Why does it claim our admiration? Because we suppose that the motives, which prompted its execution, were not only honourable to the human Character, but even worthy of a Hero. For to release a General like Alonzo, by whom the Peruvians had been instructed in those warlike arts, which their Enemies had often practised with Success; and who had turned the tide of victory to the Peruvian Standard: to save the life of a much valued Friend, and to restore a Husband and a Father to a disconsolate Wife and helpless Child—would have been motives so noble and consistent with the virtues of a Hero, as to have stamped the Character of Rolla with the highest praise. But when we learn from Rolla's lips, that he was moved to this noble act of self-destruction “ by a motive, stronger far than

Friendship

Friendship—By Love,”—and for Cora ! the Wife of Alonzo ! and a Mother too !—our better feelings recoil at the profanation of the term ; and, although we may pity the weakness of the *Man*, we look with contempt on the character of the *Hero*. Indeed, so fiercely does this passion rage in Rolla’s breast, that, in a preceding Scene, amidst the wild distractions of lamenting Grief, when Cora supposes Alonzo to be dead, does he present himself as a Husband to her, and a Father to her Child. Is this the conduct of a man of refined sentiment, generosity, and wisdom : in short, of a Hero ? Certainly not. It may be urged in behalf of the Author, that this conduct of Rolla gives rise to one of the main Incidents in the Play, by which his Character is placed in the most interesting point of view. But is propriety and consistency of Character to be sacrificed to the pleasure arising from the surprize of Incident, or interest of Situation ? If Rolla be deprived of any portion of his refined, and almost spiritualized, affection for Cora, his character, instead of engaging our Sympathy, would excite our horror and detestation. Indeed, to none but those who are alive to the impressions of romantic gallantry, and habituated to the contemplation of the marvellous in Morals and Sentiment, can the character of Rolla be considered as proper for dramatic representation.

If

If we however should admit that the Author was justified in assigning the passion of Love for an Object (whose situation precluded a return of affection) as the noblest and most powerful motive for all the heroic actions of Rolla ; yet, when we view his conduct, not only as a Lover, but also as a Politician, a General, and an Orator, we cannot but consider the Author as strangely departing from Truth and Nature in representing such incongruity in the Manners of Tragedy. For, instead of a half-civilized Savage (such as the best of the Peruvians must have been) we find Rolla's character represented as a compound of the European gallantry of a former age, mixed with modern German Sentiment, and a tolerable sprinkling of English Manners. Elvira stands prominent among the group of Personages in this Drama. The Author seems to have bestowed no common pains, to render her an object of Sympathy and Interest. Her sentiments are lofty, her language energetic, and the virtuous struggles of repentance and remorse are forcibly depicted. Yet, on a close investigation of the Character, it does not strike me as founded in Nature, nor consistently supported as drawn by the Author. That a cloistered recluse should, on the first mention of Pizarro's exploits, conceive a violent attachment for his Person and Character, is an extravagant supposition ; but that she should

should afterwards be seduced by this illiterate, ferocious, and every-way unpolished Adventurer—(the *murderer* of her *Brother* by his Sword, and of her *Mother* through Grief)—to abandon her noble Family, her Fame, her Home; to share the dangers, humours, and crimes of such a Lover—is an outrage against probability, and in contradiction to the best feelings of the human mind. None but an abandoned character could have acted like Elvira. Yet is she depicted as possessing sensibility, moral feeling, a high tone of sentiment, and great powers of Mind! But when she does appear upon the scene of action, is there not great inconsistency in her conduct? It appears that jealousy and revenge urged her to conceive the design of assassinating Pizarro; but afterwards we learn, from her own solemn declaration to Rolla, that “she had put by all rank ‘corous motive of private vengeance.’” What produced this wonderful change in the motives for her conduct? It cannot be ascribed solely to the determination of Pizarro to destroy Alonzo. She had been too often a witness of his bloody and rapacious conduct. The wrongs of human nature, and of justice, had long before cried aloud for vengeance: but, not until a Rival crossed her way, did Elvira feel a desire to revenge these injuries perpetrated by Pizarro. At the close of the First Act she expresses her

terror

terror and remorse, and wishes to fly from such dreadful Scenes. But, in spite of such an avowal, we find that she had accompanied, as a Warrior, Pizarro and his band of Robbers on *that very attack*, the horrors and cruelty of which she had so pathetically deplored ! And still further to make the inconsistency of this *beterocelite* Character, she not only accompanied the Spaniards on this dreadful occasion, but also had displayed such *warlike* bravery as to extort the praise from Pizarro, that " in War " she was the Soldier's pattern." What must have been her conduct, to have merited *such* praise from *such* a character ? That she piqued herself upon her warlike prowess with no small degree of exultation, is evident, from her answer to Pizarro's exclamation, " Why had not " all men hearts like thine ?" " Then," she replies, " would thy brows this day have worn " the Crown of Quito !" The Character of Pizarro differs too much from the opinion we are led to form of it from Valverde's description. For, from so very illiterate and unpolished a Chief, bred up amidst the dregs of the lowest orders of Society, we scarcely could have expected either dignity of Language, or nobleness of Sentiment. But, on every occasion, we find Pizarro deliver his thoughts in the same lofty Style with the other more dignified Characters ; and, in his treatment of Rolla, he evinces such

true

true generosity of Soul, as is incompatible with the vindictive brutality of his general conduct. I am well aware that, in no human heart, is the Voice of humanity completely stifled; but Pizarro is represented to be such a Monster of revenge and cruel depravity, as to render his conduct to Rolla improbable and uncharacteristic. It is a just critical dogma, and may be applied to this, as well as every other dramatic Character :

“ Servetur ad imum,
“ Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi confitet.”

“ Preserve a just, consistent plan,
“ And let him end as he began.”

The Character of Ataliba is but feebly sketched. Rolla so eclipses the lustre of his Master's fame, that we almost lose sight of this Offspring of the Peruvian Deity. When he did appear, we might have expected a Style dignified, and suited to his Rank and Character; but, as I shall point out hereafter, he generally displays an equal poverty in Style and Sentiment. The Character of Las Casas exhibits traits which do honour to humanity, and affords a pleasing contrast to the other Spaniards leagued in this foul enterprize. His eloquence and heart-rending appeals might have softened even the flinty hearts of his cruel and avaricious Countrymen. I have no hesitation in affirming, that
the

the Character of Las Casas is not only the most unexceptionable, but, likewise, that which is most justly entitled to our Sympathy, in the whole of this Drama. The distracting grief of Cora, as well as the violence of all her emotions, seems to me better fitted to excite the Sympathy of common minds, than to produce a similar feeling in minds of a more just and refined sensibility. Alonzo occupies a considerable rank in the list of the Author's Characters. He is drawn in a very amiable, though not brilliant point of light. He forms, however, a striking contrast to Pizarro, and thus heightens the general interest of the Play. The Character is supported with uniform consistency, and gains a considerable portion of the Spectator's regard and sympathy. The Characters of the Peruvian Cacique, and blind Old Man, produce much dramatic effect; but the Manners of both are the reverse of Peruvian. The former, deeply skilled in Rhetoric, manages his tropes and figures with no small dexterity. He might be supposed to have studied Oratory in the Schools, and have been versed in the Christian code of Religion. Yet, as a Pagan Chief, he must be supposed to be wedded to the superstitions of his Country. Valverde appears at first to be a thorough-paced Villain. Elvira considers his attachment to her as the offspring of "base lucre and mean fraud." His rescuing
Elvira,

Elvira, therefore, at the certain risk of his life, is a palpable contradiction to the selfish meanness of his general conduct.

The rest of the inferior Characters are exempt from any particular observation, as they merely serve either to swell the train of their Superiors, or to connect the dialogue, and supply a few links to the chain of Incidents.

On the Sentiments.

TRAGEDY not only requires that the Manners should be characteristic, but also that the Sentiments should be conformable to the Characters. The conformity of the Sentiments ought to appear in the predominant Manners of the respective Characters; and likewise should be manifested in every varied situation or circumstance in which they may be placed. In Pizarro, great scope was afforded, both for originality and copiousness of Sentiment. The representation of a People emerging from Barbarism, and governed by peculiar Manners and Customs, both of Religion and civil Polity, was favourable to a development of striking and affecting Sentiment. But no such originality of Sentiment, no striking contrast of the peculiar modification of Character to be expected from a difference in Manners, Customs and Prejudices

dices is to be found in this Play. On the contrary, we find the Peruvian Characters make frequent and solemn appeals to the Deity. They acknowledge his peculiar Providence and moral Attributes; and their conceptions of Man's supreme Good, both in the present and a future State, are strictly consonant to the most enlightened system of Religion*.

I shall select some striking examples, to shew that this discrepancy, between the Manners and Sentiments, is not merely accidental or occasional; but pervades the whole of the sentiments and language of the Peruvian Characters. Orozimbo (as before observed) utters Sentiments altogether inconsistent with the Character of a Peruvian Cacique. He calls Alonzo

* "The Peruvians," says Dr. Robertson, "had not indeed made such progress in observation or inquiry, as to have attained just conceptions of the Deity; nor was there in their language any proper name or appellation of the Supreme Power, which intimated that they had formed any idea of him as the Creator and Governor of the World."

Some of their superstitions, mentioned by the same Writer, were cruel and detestable. "On the death of the Incas, or any other eminent Personage, a considerable number of their Attendants were put to death, and interred in their Guacas, that he might appear in the next World in his former Dignity. At the celebration of the funeral obsequies of Huana Capac, one thousand of his Attendants were put to death."

"the

" the Guardian-Angel of Peru ;" boasts of the " treasure he had stored in Heaven ;" remarks that, as he had " never trembled before God, " why should he tremble before man ?" and dies with importuning blessings on Elvira, and praying that Heaven may pardon and turn his murderers' hearts. These Sentiments, which would have flowed with propriety from the lips of Las Casas under similar circumstances, are altogether unsuitable to the notions and character of a Peruvian. Rolla scarcely utters a Sentiment that is not at variance with Peruvian Manners. That fine piece of declamation, his Address to the Soldiers, so flagrantly violates Peruvian ideas of Government, Morals, and Religion ; and is so evidently calculated to serve a temporary purpose, that it must be considered (though beautiful when viewed apart) as extraneous matter, tending to break the unity of Action in a Drama, otherwise sufficiently negligent in its Composition. But the violation of propriety in the Sentiments is not solely confined to political, moral, and theological Subjects. It occurs in the mode of familiar allusion and common expression. Witness the answer of the blind Old Man to the Boy, who, on the report of Cannon, shouts " There is fire and smoke ;" when this old Peruvian remarks, " Yes, *Fire* is the weapon of those " *fiends.*" Such an allusion from a Peruvian, and

a Pagan, is so palpably absurd, that to excite ridicule it needs only to be mentioned.

Elvira utters Sentiments worthy of a more dignified Character. Indeed, her Character and Sentiments are so much at variance, that great part of the beauty of the latter is obscured by the inconsistency of the former. In the first Act, when ordered by Pizarro to retire, she breaks out into the following beautiful and energetic appeal, ill suited to the general tenor of her Conduct, " Oh! Men! Men! ungrateful and perverse! Oh, Woman! still affectionate, though wrong'd! The Beings to whose Eyes you turn for animation, hope and rapture, through the days of mirth and reveling; and on whose bosoms, in the hour of sore calamity, you seek for rest and consolation.—THEM, *when the pompous follies of your mean ambition* are the question, You treat as Play-things or as Slaves."

The pompous follies of your mean ambition sounds strangely from the lips of a woman who had sacrificed Friends, Country, and Reputation on the Altar of that Idol. Her answer to Pizarro, who demands, if he should rejoice at his recent defeat, manifests an Ossian-like sublimity of Style and Imagery, not equalled by any other passage in the Tragedy. " No! I would have thee cold and dark, as the night that follows the departed Storm; still and full'en,

as

" as the awful pause that precedes Nature's con-
 " vulsion: Yet I would have thee feel assured
 " that a new morning shall arise, when the
 " Warrior's Spirit shall stalk forth, nor fear the
 " future, nor lament the past." But this splen-
 did passage is liable to the objection of unfit-
 ness to the Character. The feeling, agonized
 Elvira, who shrank from the bare mention of
 the attack which led to Pizarro's discomfiture,
 ought not to have uttered such Sentiments of
 Warlike enterprize and valour. Many of the
 Maternal Sentiments of Cora are moving and
 pathetic; yet, others appear to be overstrained,
 and surfeit by excess of feeling. The constant
 whine of morbid Sensibility, instead of increas-
 ing Sympathy, deadens its force. Her descrip-
 tion of the three maternal Holidays seems to me
 far-fetched, and offensive to good taste. The
 " white blossoms of his teeth breaking the crim-
 " som buds that did incase them," is truly a
 prettiness of expression, ill suited to the descrip-
 tion of one of the most painful maladies of suf-
 fering infancy. In the same Scene the *Antithe-*
sis of Persons, which Mr. Dangle in the Critic
 justly styles " a most established figure; ", is dex-
 troufly introduced.

Tilburina. " Canst thou reject the SUPPLIANT and
 " the DAUGHTER too ?"

Governor. " NO MORE. I would not have thee plead
 " in vain. The FATHER softens, but the GOVERNOR
 " is fixed."

Cora.

Cora. " This timid excess of Love, producing
" Fear, instead of Valour, flatters, but does not con-
" vinc me. The WIFE is incredulous."

Rolla. " And is the MOTHER unbelieving too?"

Cora. " No MORE. Do with me as you please."

In the following Scene there is a Sentiment uttered by the Boy, so pleasing and natural, that I cannot forbear transcribing it.

Old Man. " But should the Enemy come, they will
" drag thee from me, my Boy."

Boy. " Impossible, Grandfather! for they will see
" at once that you are old and blind, and cannot do
" without me."

How forced, bald, and unnatural, does the following Sentiment of Cora appear, when contrasted with the simplicity of the one just quoted! Rolla entreats Cora to "listen to Alonzo's Friend." She replies, " You bid me listen to the World; who was not Alonzo's Friend?" Never before, I verily believe, did an afflicted Heroine utter so frigid a Conceit. It is the very Antipodes of natural feeling and correct taste.

The Soliloquy of Rolla, on entering Alonzo's Dungeon, contains some beautiful Sentiment; but labours under the charge of being ill-timed. For Rolla ought to be so intent on effecting Alonzo's release, as to have neither time nor inclination to indulge in a long sentimental effusion. It may justly be observed, that most of the Soliloquies abound in wire-drawn Sentiment,

ment, to a degree, which fatigues the Attention, and lessens the Interest of the Audience.

On the Style.

THE Style, or Language of the drama, has always been considered an essential part of its constitution. The Style of Pizarro forms an anomaly in English Tragedy. I know not how to characterise it, except by the expression of “Prose run mad.” There have been few Tragedies in our Language written in Prose, which have gained applause either on the Stage or in the Closet. One or two, which have succeeded, were composed in a different Style from Pizarro. George Barnwell and the Stranger are founded on domestic and familiar Life; and, therefore, do not admit of an elevated poetic Style. Pizarro, on the contrary, contains lofty characters and sentiments, illustrated by figurative and poetic imagery, but not elevated by regular Metre. That regular Metre is *essential* to Poetry, I by no means affirm; but, to constitute a perfect Poem or Tragedy in our Tongue, it seems an indispensable requisite. For to *please*, as well as to *instruct*, is a legitimate object of Poetry—“Aut prodesse volunt, aut *delectare poetæ*.” The observation of a celebrated Poet and Critic, Dr. Beattie, “That in Tragedy the versification
“ may

" may be both harmonious and dignified, because
 " the Characters are taken chiefly from High
 " Life, and the Events from a remote Period;
 " and because the higher Poetry is permitted to
 " imitate Nature, not as it is, but in that state of
 " perfection in which it might be," applies aptly
 to the drama under consideration. Its Subject would have admitted, nay indeed at times demanded, both a dignified and poetic Style.

Aristotle in his definition of *Tragedy*, maintains, that the Style of the Tragic drama should be "agreeably *relishing*, and contain Number, Verse, and Harmony." Blank-Vers, I conceive, is very properly the Metre in which Tragedy, in our Language, most successfully conveys both delight and instruction : For, as an elegant Writer * justly observes, " It rises gracefully into the sublime ; it can slide happily into the familiar ; hasten its career, if impelled by vehement passion ; pause in the hesitation of doubt ; appear lingering and languid in dejection and sorrow ; is capable of varying its accent, and adapting its harmony to the Sentiment it should convey, and the Passion it would excite, with all the power of musical expression."

Shakespear, Otway, and Rowe have shewn how pathetic sentiment and dignified declama-

* *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear.*

tion

tion may be enriched by Metre. Why then depart from such Models? Was it the intention to improve upon them? If so, the object has not been obtained. For although Pizarro be not destitute of harmonious and beautiful passages, yet, upon the whole, it exhibits a patchwork of regular Metre, inflated Prose, and vulgar phraseology. Sometimes the Language soars into the region of Blank Verse, and is indeed only Prose to the Eye :

“ On Iron pennons borne, the blood-stain’d Vulture
 “ Cleaves the Storm, yet is the plumage closest
 “ To her breast, soft as the Cygnet’s down, and
 “ O’er her unhell’d brood the murmur’ring Ring-Dove
 “ Sits not more gently.”

In a few other passages, where the Imagery is grand, and the Sentiments elevated, according to the warmth of passion and dignity of the Speaker, an approach is made towards regular Metre. Take Elvira’s soliloquy at the close of the third Act, as affording an instance of sublime description, disfigured by tumid phraseology, forced inversion of Style, and a neglect of uniform metrical arrangement. “ Yes thou un-
 “ daunted ! Thou whom yet no mortal hazard
 “ has appalled ! Thou who on Panama’s brow
 “ *didst* make alliance with the raving elements,
 “ that tore the silence of that horrid night !
 “ when thou *didst* follow, as thy Pioneer, the
 “ crashing

" crashing thunder's drift ; and, stalking o'er
 " the trembling earth, *didst* plant thy banners
 " by the red Volcano's mouth. Thou, who when
 " battling on the Sea, and thy brave Ship *was*
 " blown to splinters, *wast* seen *as thou didst* be-
 " stride a fragment of the smoaking wreck, to
 " wave thy glittering sword above thy head, *as*
 " *thou wouldst* defy the World in that ex-
 " tremity !"

The passages most entitled to approbation, on account of Style, are those which approach nearest to Blank Verse ; but, for want of attention to metrical uniformity, these suffer a degradation by their being incorporated with downright vulgar prose. Not that I conceive every subordinate Character in Tragedy should deliver a message, or utter the most trivial thought, in Blank Verse. Shakespear has drawn the proper line. Blank Verse is always used by this Poet in the loftier Scenes of Tragedy, where the Sentiments and Characters demand an elevated Style : but, in the less interesting Scenes, where familiar Characters are introduced, he judiciously descends to a correspondent Style and Language. But even granting that *numerous* and *elevated* Prose may be adapted to the more dignified Characters of Tragedy with propriety and effect, I am sure it will not be denied, that all vulgar expressions and low ideas tend to degrade such personages. When we hear Ataliba,

the

the Monarch and Representative of the God of the Peruvians, express himself more than once on the same subject, in the following terms, Ridicule, instead of Sympathy, must be excited.

Enter ATALIBA wounded, with ORANO and Officers.

Ataliba. " My wound is bound. Believe me, the hurt is *nothing*, I may return to the Fight."

Again,

" Thanks, thanks, my Children, I am well, believe it,
" The blood once stopt, the wound was *nothing**."

On the Moral.

THAT the tragic Drama may be rendered a powerful auxiliary to Virtue and good Morals, has been generally admitted. For to excite emotions which tend to purify and strengthen the various sympathies of our Nature † is, (or ought

* The Author seems in this instance to have only stopt short, " on the precipice of Absurdity." Indeed it reminds me of a Line, said to have been spoken by one of Dryden's Heroes (I believe, in 'Tyrannic Love.')

" My wound is great, because it is so small."

To which a Wit in the Boxes instantly replied,

" Then 'twould be greater, were it none at all."

† Aristotle takes in as part of his definition of Tragedy, the following Sentence, " That without the assistance of
" Nar-

ought to be) its peculiar province and design. When it attains this noble moral end, by means which serve at the same time to warm the imagination, gratify the judgment, and please the taste, it then rises to its highest pitch of excellence. There are many Moral beauties in the play of Pizarro. Poetical Justice is almost strictly attended to, by punishing Vice, and rendering Virtue triumphant. The duties of Loyalty and Patriotism are strongly enforced. The endearing sensibilities of conjugal and maternal affection make forcible appeals to the heart. Notwithstanding these excellencies, it is still liable to objections on the score of morality: and these not of a slight and trivial nature. It certainly would be uncandid, if not unjust, to impute to the Author of this drama, a *fixed design* of exalting Natural, to an equality with Revealed Religion. But I am convinced, from his manner of contrasting the Characters and Conduct of the Peruvians and Spaniards, that such an Effect is likely to be produced. The exalted notions of Religion and Morality, so uniformly characterizing the Manners and Conduct of the Peruvians, and which are so studiously placed in opposition to the base, bloody, and atrocious Actions and Sentiments of the principal Characters of the Spaniards, confirm the truth of

.. Narration it perfectly refines in us all sorts of passions, by
“means of Pity and Terror.”

this

this remark. There lurks something insidious in that Sentiment of Rolla in his Address to Pizarro. "I thought forgiveness of injuries had been the Christian's precept, thou seest it is the Peruvian's practice." For it has been proved that the Peruvians were tainted with gross superstitions of a barbarous nature ; and History farther bears testimony, that the life of a Brother was sacrificed by Ataliba, from motives of Ambition and supposed personal Safety. When the Peruvian Cacique intreats Heaven to pardon and turn his murderers' hearts, he not only borrows Christian precepts, but follows the Christian Example. Why thus violate Historic probability ? What motive can we assign for the attempt to demonstrate, that the Religion and Morality of the Peruvians were equal, if not superior, to the lights of Revealed Religion ? But it may be said, that the virtues of Las Casas and Alonzo exhibit such exalted proofs of the excellence of the Christian doctrines, as to justify this Author in so strongly *contraving* his Characters. It is true they form a splendid exception to the general charge : Yet, something like distributive justice should have been observed in his conduct towards the two Nations. The Peruvians are elevated *above* the rest of mankind : The Spaniards degraded *below* the scale of humanity.

If any Nation (in other respects nearly barbarous) had attained such just and refined no-
tions

tions of Piety and Morals, as the Peruvians are represented to be endowed with ; it would have been right and even instructive to have pourtrayed such striking and important facts. But a People so circumstanced have not appeared upon our Globe. It is therefore to falsify the History of the human Mind and Character, to represent such Phænomena as having had existence. The frequent and solemn appeals to the Deity introduced in this Play, deserve severe reprehension. They tend to lessen that habitual reverence for the supreme Being, which ought always to be cherished, and they are opposed to all the principles of good Writing and Taste. It is an easy matter to supply the want of Sentiment, and force of Expression, by invoking the Name of the Deity. Our customary association of every thing striking and awful with that Name excites a powerful emotion in the Mind, and thus elevates and impresses a Sentiment which would otherwise have fallen lifeless from the Speaker's lips. But let it be remembered, that habit destroys the force of this association ; and that when the associated idea becomes familiar, the sentiment sinks into its own insignificance, and ceases to affect even vulgar minds, though it still continues to disgust those of the more rational and enlightened.

The Character of Elvira is calculated to attract more admiration and esteem, than is consistent

fistent with a just sense of female decorum and virtuous sensibility. She is not qualified for a Tragic Heroine. Her departure from the strict rules of female chastity and refined delicacy, is too gross to be palliated by a shew of half-stifled repentance, lofty sentiment, and energy of character. The heroic Actions of Rolla arise from motives so romantic, and are fraught with so much danger to sound Morals, as to be better calculated to excite admiration than to serve for example. A Platonic affection for youth and beauty in the other Sex may not be problematic with many ; but I will venture to maintain, that the open avowal of Rolla's passion, (however sublime) for Cora, who was become a Wife and Mother, (Characters sacred in the estimation of all who reverence the most important institution of civilized life) is a profanation of legitimate Sentiment, and ought not to have been assigned as the great exciting Cause of all that Hero's achievements.

To sum up the Character of the Drama.—It must be considered as possessing many faults, with some beauties. When compared with the excellent dramatic Works of our best Writers, its pretensions are too feeble to be worthy of notice. It suffers even by comparison with some of modern date. Its chief *defects* are, a violation of all Historic probability ; a want of connection and coincidence in the Plot ; a Diction unsuitable

suitable to the genius of Tragic composition in our Language ; little attention to the preservation of consistency in the Characters and Manners ; and, finally, the Moral is tarnished by unjust views of human nature. Its *beauties* consist chiefly in pathetic Sentiment, and energetic declamation ; an attention to dramatic situation and stage effect ; and, last, though not least, a display of theatrical Pomp in the adventitious decorations of Song, Processions, and Scenery *.

* Yet this play appears to me, with regard to Music and Scenic decoration, splendidly infipid. We may posseſs, (as was obſerved by a Critic thirty years ago on the dramatic producſtions of that period) the Robes and Proceſſions of Tragedy, but want her rousing and animated Spirit. Indeed, as Foote has obſerved in his occasional Prologue, " Tailors are deemed the only Poets now;" and we may add, that " Carpenters and Scene Painters are the only Actors for bringing full Houses ; but this will ever be the caſe till Public Taste and Spirit throw just and neceſſary Contempt on ſuch frippery exhibitions as Nature and Reaſon muſtually bluſh at." DRAMATIC CENSOR.

F I N I S.







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